



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

BARDIC PORTRAITS.

TALIESIN.

AMONG the modern nations of Europe few, if any, can boast of poetical remains of equal antiquity with those claimed by the Welsh. And of these the Works of Taliesin may be regarded in every point of view as the most remarkable. Their many references, both to historical events, and to the mystical doctrines of the Druids, place them in a pre-eminent rank as memorials of the early age, in which their author flourished,—while the poetical excellence of most, however obscured by the lapse of time, proves the justice of his claim to the honourable appellation, given him in the Triads, of “Chief of the Bards*.” There are seventy-eight poems preserved under his name in the *Archaiology of Wales*: and besides those, above noticed, of an historical and mystical character, they comprise others, which may be described generally as theological, encomiastic, elegiac, and lyrical. Many of these remains may be proved to be genuine by the reference, which the bard makes in them to himself as the author †; and others by their allusion to occurrences, which are known from other sources to have happened in his time, as well from the concurrent suffrage of later bards as to the fact.

According to these records, and also to the testimony of some ancient MSS., the life of Taliesin occupied about fifty years, during the middle of the sixth century. The first incident, which we learn of it, is similar to that recorded of the infant Moses. For Taliesin is reported to have been found, exposed in a coracle, in a fishing wear, on the coast of Cardigan, belonging to Elffin, son of Gwyddno Garanhir, king of Gwent, of whom mention is made in a preceding page of this Number ‡. He was received, from that moment, under the protection of Elffin, who must have continued his patronage for some years, as we find, that he introduced him afterwards to his father’s court, upon which occasion the young bard (for he is presumed to have been

* The Triad, here alluded to, describes him also as one of the three chief bards of the Isle of Britain with Merddin Emrys and Merddin, son of Morfryn, who was a pupil of Taliesin.—*Arch. of Wales*, vol. ii. p. 75.

† See *Arch. of Wales*, vol. i. p. 21, 25, 50, &c.

‡ It is supposed by some, that the catastrophe, noticed in p. 8, *ante*, was the means of reducing Gwyddno to the necessity of supporting Elffin, his only son, by the produce of the wear here alluded to. But the circumstance is not very material: nor, if it were, can it be ascertained with any precision.

then a mere boy) presented to Gwyddno his mystical poem, entitled Taliesin's History (*Hanes Taliesin* *), and to his patron that called the Consolation of Elffin (*Dyhuddiant Elffin* †), both of them still extant. The latter effusion, which is delicately written in the character of an exposed orphan, was designed to console Elffin on the recent failure of his fishery, a circumstance attributed, it seems, both by himself and others, to the extravagance and dissipation of his past life. Taliesin endeavours, with great ingenuity, to remove his melancholy on this occasion, and, from the beautiful moral feeling displayed in the poem, we may conclude, that his effort was not made in vain. A literal translation of this production will be found in a subsequent part of the present Number.

We find the bard's gratitude towards his patron evinced by another effusion, entitled the Mead-Song (*Canu y Mëdd* ‡), written during Elffin's imprisonment in the castle of Deganwy, where he was confined by his uncle Maelgwn, sovereign of North Wales, with whom Taliesin was afterwards in particular favour. And we learn from his poem on the Sons of Llyr (*Kerdd am Veib Llyr* §), as well as from some old Welsh historians, that he succeeded, by the magic of his song, in redeeming Elffin from his captivity.

How soon his connection with Elffin ceased does not appear;—but in the maturer part of his life we find him to have been the bard of Urien Reged, a Cumbrian chieftain, who is also celebrated in the poems of Llywarch Hên. Urien, as we are informed by the Genealogy of the Saints (*Bonedd y Saint*,) came to settle in South Wales, where for some time he distinguished himself by his military services, but was, towards the close of his life, numbered amongst the saints of Bangor Catwg, in Glamorgan ||. Taliesin has addressed several poems to him, in one of which ¶ he describes himself as residing at that period near the lake Ceirionydd, in Caernarvonshire :

And I also Taliesin

Of the banks of the lake Ceirionydd.

Of the education of this "chief of bards," all, known with any certainty, is that it was completed under the celebrated Catwg, surnamed the Wise, at Llanfeithin, in Glamorgan. He

* Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 19. † Ib. p. 83. ‡ Ib. p. 22.

§ Ib. p. 67. See also p. 34, where another allusion is made to this event.

"Doddwyf Deganwy," &c.

|| See the "Cambrian Biography."

¶ *Anrec Urien*. Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 50.

was the first abbot of Llancarfan, and is distinguished by his excellent collection of antient Welsh maxims, which are published in the *Archaïology* *. Taliesin, as a bard, was necessarily initiated in the Druidical mysteries, and to which some of his writings, as before noticed, prove him to have been strongly attached. He had a son Afaon, who is represented as having renounced the peaceful pursuits of bardism for the turbulent occupation of a warrior, in which capacity he fought under Cadwallon, Prince of North Wales. For this reason he is described, in an antient Triad, with two others, likewise of bardic parentage, as one of the "three chief-like bulls" of the isle of Britain. Taliesin is supposed to have died about the year 570 †.

The variety of the verse, as well as of the topics, embraced by Taliesin's muse, makes it difficult to ascribe to it any general character. He not only employed most of the metres then in use, but even enriched his poetry with others borrowed from the Greek and Roman writers, before that time unknown to the language,—but since familiarly used by the bards as far as they could be adapted to the genius of the Welsh tongue, and the peculiar character of its poetry.

That Taliesin had profited by the able instruction of Catwg is clear from several parts of his writings, where the allusions, he makes, prove the great extent of his learning for the age in which he lived. But what he seems to have studied with superior avidity and success was, as already intimated, the mystical lore of the Druids, with which many of his productions are so deeply impregnated as to become extremely obscure, if not, for the most part, unintelligible. The doctrine of metempsychosis, in particular, appears to have been a favourite theme. Two or three of his poems are expressly devoted to it, and afford a singular instance of the effect of that wild notion upon a powerful and creative imagination. As a repository of the maxims of Druidism, however, and also as a record of historical facts, the productions of Taliesin must be admitted to possess an important

* Vol. iii. p. 1 to 99.

† I am not ignorant, that an attempt has been made, by the very intelligent author of the "*Celtic Researches*," and of the "*Mythology and Rites of the Druids*," to throw an air of fable over this account of Taliesin. But, if this note should meet the eye of that gentleman, he will pardon me, I hope, for observing, that there appears, in the instance above noticed at least, too laboured an effort to subject to a favourite hypothesis all antient facts and authorities,—too manifest an anxiety to drag history captive at the triumphal car of mythology.—Ed.

value. His elegiac and lyrical poems abound in pathetic touches, as well as in sublime fancy and fine moral thought. And we can hardly accuse him of an unjustifiable degree of vanity, when we hear him designate himself as being at once a poet and a man of erudition *, or even when he claims, for the property of his muse, the flowing speech of a prophet †.

* *

WELSH MUSIC.—No. I.

—000—

To the EDITOR of the CAMBRO-BRITON.

SIR,—As the CAMBRO-BRITON is to be devoted to Wales, her History, Poetry, and Literature in general, a few observations on her *Music* will, I trust, be acceptable to your readers. It will be necessary for me to express myself in a manner different from what I should do, were I addressing persons acquainted with the science, and to avoid technical phrases. For few would understand me, were I to say, that, “to modulate from the tonic to the dominant, a sharp 4th will be required, or to modulate from the tonic to the sub-dominant, a flat 7th will be necessary, &c. &c.” I feel it incumbent on me to say thus much, lest some discordant brother might feel disposed to notice my (supposed) lack of knowledge.

In the course of my professional career, I have had the good fortune to hear specimens of almost every national music, from the classic strains of the Italian, to the wild war-song of the rude Indian.—And to none shall the *Welsh* yield in point of character! What can be more characteristic than, *Of a noble Race was Shenkin?* The immortal Handel introduced it, in one of his Operas; and Mr. Cramer, the celebrated piano-forte performer, thus mentions it in his Instruction Book—“This Air is a fine specimen of the Welsh national music; originality and boldness of character are united in the melody.”—*The Rising of the Lark* is another beautiful air, full of energy and melody. Dr. Haydn said, that it was one of the finest compositions he had ever heard. This is a great favourite among the singers in Wales;

* “Wyf llogell cerdd, wyf llëenydd.” *Buarth Beirdd*, Arch. of Wales, vol. i. p. 27. Many other similar instances occur in his poems.

† Mydwyf Taliesin

Areith lif Dewin.—*Canu y Byd Mawr*. Ib. p. 25.